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It has been about four years since the Georgetown Boathouse issue has been put down after much controversy. While the desire for river based activities, as embodied in the original proposal are quite sincere, the original proposal suffered from many flaws, which in that proposal were pushed aside.

One of the major flaws in the original proposal and the studies used to justify it was that the Boathouse clearly impinged in the C&O National Historic Park, a resource that the National Park Service is sworn to promote and protect. The original Environmental Impact Statement considered the needs of Georgetown University and almost completely ignored the C&O NHP. Despite many objection and points raised, this flaw was never addressed. No consideration of the uses of the park were included. Instead, it did contain a proposed horror story of an alternative boathouse upstream that was clearly fictitious as it could not be possibly built as drawn. It lacked any allowable access, not to mention severe grade problems, safety issues and local legal requirements.

Other problems in that study were its dismissing of obvious detrimental visual impacts as well as conflicts with other, pre-existing uses. These included a rather critical and heavily used section of the towpath as it enters the waterfront, and in which any further degradation would be extremely detrimental to its existence.

The National Park Service is charged with protecting all National Parks, including the C&O, and they are required to protect them. Removing from use a section of a park for private use is not permissible or consistent with the mission of the National Park Service unless it can be clearly shown to be an improvement in the condition of the Park and in its best interest.

The last examination of the Boathouse scene gave only minor attention to this issue using very poor criteria. There were no attempts to examine alternatives, using Georgetown University's desires in preference to the advocates for the park. A clear degradation of the Park was ignored, for example, by using viewpoints outside the park and not part of the immediate environment, which was ignored. A justification of a landswap was used showing a threat of a hypothetical boathouse on Georgetown University's land that could not be built due to physical limitations of the parcel and the granting of rights that they do not possess, including legal limitations on an easement that does not convey any use rights. There was certainly no true demonstration of improvements to the park, including the environment immediately adjacent to the towpath, a critical feature that is essential to its existence. There was no mention of items, such as an imposing roof line, that impacted the park and not examined for being essential to the proposed uses. The Park should not be diminished for uses, such as school social events for the sole benefit of a private entity to the detriment of the public and which occurred in the previous study.

It is welcome that an expanded field of study is being used. The park does not exist by itself and the river front through Georgetown has many desired uses. The park itself is one of these and is heavily used. Its very existence plays a major role in the uses along the river and, being a National Park, must not be compromised. The Park is public and must have preference to any desired private demands and this objective must be honored. It is held in trust not only for those immediately adjacent to the Potomac but the entire nation as a tribute to both the history of the growth of the nation, the witness it bore to conflict and to honor a Supreme Court Justice who promoted environmental preservation as part of the nation's heritage. Any alternative uses must be justified with these aims and are required to be given precedence.

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